



# All The Crave

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A dazzling designer gown. A romantic garden as the fairy-tale setting. A tender father-and-daughter dance. All are ingredients for a never-to-be-forgotten reception. But as any seasoned wedding professional knows, the real way to guests' hearts is through their stomachs. To ensure your fare is a fashionable feast that will win everyone over, we spoke to area professionals for the dish on what's hot and what's not on the culinary front.



Marcey Brownstein Catering & Events



The Shadowbrook



The Ultimate Caterer

“Restaurant trends are followed more closely than fashion trends lately! And that certainly comes into play in the menus being chosen for receptions,” says Leslie Russell, an event planner for the New York-based Marcey Brownstein Catering & Events ([www.marceybrownstein.com](http://www.marceybrownstein.com)) “We have seen lots of brides and grooms wanting gorgeous tasting menus with seasonal, fresh, local ingredients that mimic the style of menus in the newest restaurants.

“While we still have lots of requests for cocktail-style receptions, with passed hors d'oeuvres and stations of nibbles, people are realizing this may not be a cost-saver in the end and are returning to a more classic style of service,” Russell explains. “But sometimes people worry about the stuffiness of a formal seated dinner, which we can alleviate with more whimsical passed hors d'oeuvres at cocktail hour, a great time for more fun. As such, we see a lot of filet mignon sliders, mini gruyere mac and cheese, truffled deviled eggs, and the never-out-of-style pigs in the blanket. Even a kitschy dish like that can be made more elegant with a gorgeous presentation, homemade puff pastry, and horseradish-infused mustard.”



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“The majority of couples still request sit-down dinners,” notes Charlie Krause, owner of the Palm House ([www.palmhouse.com](http://www.palmhouse.com)), Brooklyn, New York. “But instead of the entire dinner being butler served, we serve a first course, a salad, then open stations to guests. These are usually a fish station with caviar, smoked salmon, and shrimp; a beef station with filet mignon and rack of lamb; and a Tuscan station with all kinds of pasta, veggies, cheeses, and fruits.”

Increasingly, rigid formality is giving way to a more fluid style. “In the past, weddings were pretty much all structured in the same way. Now, typical is out; personal, casual, and relaxed are in,” declares Thomas Barretta, director of food and beverage at New York’s Glen Cove Mansion ([www.glencovemansion.com](http://www.glencovemansion.com)).

Those who worry that laid-back might translate into chintzy and plain, however, can rest easy. Upscale picnic-y events, unusual venues, and never-ending cocktail parties with

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butler-passed choices are novel, sophisticated ways to make any wedding a real ball, according to Alan Perl, owner of Ultimate Caterer ([www.ultimatecaterer.com](http://www.ultimatecaterer.com)), Marlboro, New Jersey.

Location helps set the tone. “Our lovely gardens lend themselves beautifully for loads of cocktail receptions, which can be either buffet or station,” says Robert Zweben, owner of the Shrewsbury, New Jersey-based Shadowbrook ([www.shadowbrook.com](http://www.shadowbrook.com)). “It’s less formal; people go in and out from the rooms to the gardens, and it’s a lot more flexible and fluid.”

Couples are still spending the money, but rather than indiscriminately choosing mass quantities of “regular” fare, they’re splurging on luxury foods and premium drinks in smaller portions presented in distinctive ways. “The predominant trend is definitely smaller portions served uniquely,” states Kathi R. Evans, president of All the Best Weddings & Celebrations ([www.atbcelebrations.com](http://www.atbcelebrations.com)). “For instance, beef tips served on a bread skewer or chocolate mousse served on a cookie spoon are big hits.”

Perl adds ceviche or sorbet spoons, Chinese food containers for penne vodka or cold sesame noodles, and soupolinis (shots of soups) to the list of inventive serving options.

Those choosing sit-down dinners are going for duets, Perl notes. Instead of salad and appetizers, they’ll pick one or a composed plate of two courses in one. For example, they’ll serve a salad with wild mushroom risotto, or berries in balsamic vinaigrette accompanied by a wild mushroom roulade.

A typical sit-down dinner at Glen Cove Mansion might consist of an appetizer such as lobster ravioli or seared scallops, a main entrée of three or four choices, then the wedding cake with an additional dessert such as crème brûlée or a mini Viennese table.



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And regardless of ethnicity, sushi—whether as hors d'oeuvres during cocktails or as stations featuring a sushi chef or sushi platters—is fast turning into a sensation.



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### *Celebrating Diversity*

The Shadowbrook frequently accommodates requests for cuisines such as Indian, Caribbean, Spanish, kosher, and total vegan weddings, as well as personalized recipes. “We’ve had brides bring in Granny’s favorite recipe and ask that we prepare it,” Zweben notes. “For mixed-culture couples, we work with them to customize anything.”

“We recently did a wedding where we had a Tuscan grill station with seared sirloin and sweet pea risotto cakes to reflect her Italian background and a French market station with cheeses, brochettes, and mini bowls of cassoulet to reflect his Parisian upbringing,” relates Russell.

Other popular ethnic-inspired stations include taco bars and wok stations, according to Evans, while Perl sees Mediterranean and Indian dishes increasingly flavoring the festivities. And regardless of ethnicity, sushi—whether as hors d'oeuvres during cocktails or as stations featuring a sushi chef or sushi platters—is fast turning into a sensation.

### *Ecofriendly Cuisine*

“The ‘green’ trend is alive and kicking,” proclaims Perl, who notes “ecoconscious” touches like the use of bamboo chinette plates at casual weddings, organic and antibiotic-free chicken, and fruit centerpieces.

Zweben reports a move away from overfished and endangered Chilean sea bass and salmon, tainted by mercury concerns, in favor of simple white fishes like tilapia.

“Couples are starting to request local, organic produce and organic beef,” Krause says. “Although it’s still only about 20 percent overall, I also see organic wines as a growing trend.”



Milton J. Gil Photography

### *Menu Musts*

Filet mignon still rules in the meat department. Rack of lamb is also a hit, while veal is becoming less requested. Fish is catching on again; sole, tilapia, and salmon are favorites. And a chicken dish of some type remains a staple.

For hors d'oeuvres, salmon (sashimi, smoked or cold) is a top request. Duck is another frequently featured cocktail item, as are new takes on standards like pigs in a blanket (wrapped in cheese puffs instead of greasy rolls) and BLT (bacon spread inside a tiny tomato wrapped in mesclun greens).

“When it comes to dinners, people are going back to basics—good quality, wholesome foods prepared simply. They want to taste the actual food instead of the 18 other ingredients thrown into its preparation,” Zweben notes. For the most part, caloric concerns get tossed with the same festive abandon as the bridal bouquet. “Our guests want to eat, drink, and celebrate,” he says. “The hell with the diet!”

Evans, however, does counsel clients to consider food allergies and special diets, such as gluten-free, vegetarian, vegan, and shellfish allergies.



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## Raise Your Glasses

Everyone we spoke with toasted martini bars—offering drinks such as appetinis and pomegranate martinis—as a hot trend. Other drink stations mentioned included champagne, mojito, and beer bars; vodka ice slides, featured at caviar stations, and high-end wines were also cited.

Signature drinks are making the rounds. “We name it after them and include a framed notice at the cocktail hour,” notes Krause.

“We design a specialty cocktail for every wedding we do, based on the preference of the bride and groom,” explains Russell. “We infuse all our own vodkas, gins, and bourbons, so they are even more special. It really is something brides and grooms want, whether it be their favorite drink, like a Mandarin Cosmo, or reflective of the season, like a Meyer Lemon Martini for early spring, or yes, even based on color—pomegranate martinis to match the burgundy linens!”

## Fantastic Finishes

“Everyone has a sweet tooth, and it can be satisfied in many ways,” says Evans, who offers chocolate fountains, ice cream sundae bars, and cannoli stations as popular options.

While cupcake cakes are not completely out, they’re getting a tad stale. In their place, there are loads of passed desserts to go along with a smaller wedding cake, which is now more just for cutting and photo op purposes. Other au courant selections, according to Russell, include mini ice cream cones and milkshakes and mini versions of

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New York classics like black and white cookies, and cheesecakes.

Perl’s top list of passed desserts includes fresh fruit kebabs, miniature Viennese pastries, cheesecake lollipops, “right-out-of-the oven” jumbo cookies served butler-style, and an international coffee bar.

At Shadowbrook, desserts go both ways—either simple like strawberry Romanoff or chocolate chantilly roulade, or sumptuous like a Viennese table with the works.

While Krause still finds that the wedding cake remains the main focus, he’s also seeing more fruit desserts, such as poached pears or homemade tri-flavored sorbets.

Going strong are “to go” stations serving coffee to departing guests. They’re also ideal for other parting goodies. “I had one client who had chocolate-covered pretzels and candy made in various flavors—dark chocolate, milk chocolate, white chocolate, peanut butter—in

take-out containers with stickers on the side thanking the guests for coming,” Evans says.

At the end of such wonderful feasts, your guests are sure to leave with a sweet taste in their mouths.



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